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ABSTRACT

In view of the cost and potential impact of guidance counselors, the New York State Office of Education Performance Review undertook this study to determine the actual role and function of guidance personnel, and the effectiveness of the counseling services they provide. The examination was based on the perceptions of counselors, parents, students, and others as measured through interviews and questionnaires. The overall finding was that guidance counseling, as currently performed, is substantially ineffective. Specific findings included the fact that two out of every five parents surveyed felt that guidance counselors had little effect on their children's development. Counselors did not appear to exercise a marked influence on student decisions with respect to choice of occupation or postsecondary education. The range of functions normally assigned to guidance departments was found to dilute the resources available for counseling and was wasteful of professional skills. The role and functions of guidance counselors were not clear, and nearly one of four counselors surveyed was unsure as to whether or not counselors themselves understood their roles. Specific recommendations are offered to district and state level boards and departments in an effort to re-establish the importance of guidance counseling services to education. (Author/PC)

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STATE OF NEW YORK

OFFICE OF EDUCATION PERFORMANCE REVIEW

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AN EVALUATION OF THE ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE GUIDANCE COUNSELOR

CG 009 387

SEPTEMBER 1974

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SUMMARY

School districts in New York State currently spend in excess of $100 million annually for guidance counseling services for elementary and secondary public school students. During the 1973-74 school year there were 5,775 professional guidance positions throughout the State.

The Education Law and existing definitions of the role of guidance counselors are exceedingly broad and general in scope. Apparently the program was designed to help students resolve educational, occupational and personal problems.

In view of the cost and potential impact of guidance counselors the Office of Education Performance Review undertook the following study to determine: (1) their actual role and functions; (2) the effectiveness of the services provided.

A major portion of this examination was based on the perceptions of counselors, parents, students and others as measured in interviews and questionnaires.

Findings

Guidance counseling as currently performed is substantially ineffective:

- Counselors do not appear to exercise a marked influence on student decisions with respect to choice of occupation or post-secondary education.
- Two out of every five parents surveyed felt that guidance counselors had little effect on their childrens development. A slightly higher percentage

of students (44 percent) felt their guidance counselors were not as helpful as they should be.

- In most specific guidance activities, parents and students reported that counselors had not been of assistance. Changing a class schedule was the only specific guidance activity for which a majority of surveyed parents and students said they had received counselor assistance.
- The range of functions normally assigned to a guidance department dilutes the resources available for counseling and is wasteful of professional counselor skills. Counselors overwhelmingly felt that general clerical work and administrative duties were the least important functions they performed, yet they spent approximately 18 percent of their work time in this manner.
- The role and functions of guidance counselors are not clear. There are major differences in how counselors, parents and students perceive guidance activities. Generally students seem to perceive counselors as sources of help for relatively short-range problems, while counselors see themselves as dealing with broader, longer-range problems.
- Nearly one out of every four counselors surveyed was unsure if counselors themselves understood their roles.
- The almost total absence of established staffing patterns makes meaningful evaluation of counseling services exceedingly difficult.

Recommendations

Guidance counseling can be a valuable service to school children. However, the lack of clearly defined objectives, an almost total absence of guidelines, excessive nonprofessional and unimportant work activities, and a general lack of understanding of their roles, results in a situation where counselors are often unable to provide meaningful services. Therefore, school district boards of education promptly should:

- develop clear program objectives responsive to local needs;
- define the role and functions of guidance counselors;
- take measures to assure that counselors are not spending an inordinate amount of time in such activities as clerical work, routine administrative duties and general "red tape";
- assure that wider use is made of students as peer counselors and volunteers as vocational counselors in support and extension of existing guidance staffs;
- assure that guidance departments make full use of community resources; and
- involve parents, teachers and students in an annual review of guidance program effectiveness.

In addition to action required at the local level, the State Education Department should provide assistance to operating school districts by:

- establishing staffing patterns for guidance counseling programs;

- clarifying the role of the guidance counselor; and
- reexamining the present distribution of guidance counselor positions between elementary and secondary schools.

BACKGROUND

School districts in New York State currently spend in excess of $100 million annually for guidance services to elementary and secondary public school students.

During the 1973-74 school year there were 5,775 professional guidance positions throughout the State. Of these, 2,079 were in New York City and the remaining 3,696 were in school districts elsewhere in the State.*

The positions reported range from director of guidance to guidance teacher (bilingual). Only 747 counselors were employed at the elementary school level (13 percent). Of these 747 elementary counselors, 544 were located in New York City; the remaining 203 were spread throughout the State and represented approximately 3.5 percent of the total positions reported. The remainder (5,028) functioned either in the secondary schools or were employed in a supervisory capacity.

The Education Law (Section 4605), which initiated guidance services in public schools, defines the basic scope of activities as follows:

"...The board of education in each school district or board of cooperative educational services may establish, conduct and maintain as a part of the public school system a guidance bureau which shall perform such of the following duties as may be determined by such board:

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* Source: State Education Department, Information Center on Education. These are positions, not people. If a person works in more than one professional field, he is counted once in each.

a. Providing information and counsel for pupils regarding educational and occupational opportunities.

b. Providing employment and follow-up services for minors in cooperation with existing public agencies.

c. Conducting research studies of pupils and the local educational and occupational opportunities in cooperation with existing public agencies.

d. Assisting in the organization of courses of study dealing with educational and occupational opportunities for use in the schools and in teaching and supervising such courses.

e. Organizing and conducting a counseling service in the schools to assist pupils in the formation of their educational and vocational plans.

f. Cooperating with other staff members to advance the educational and occupational progress of pupils."

Regulations of the Commissioner of Education mandate such programs. Section 100.1 states: "A guidance and counseling program shall be provided (in the high school)...," and "There shall be a definite and effective plan of pupil guidance (in the junior high school)..." There is no such legal requirement for the elementary schools.

Forty years ago guidance services were performed by teachers or, to a lesser extent, by school administrators as a part-time activity. Full-time guidance staffs were rare. During

the 1940's full-time personnel began to appear in the secondary schools and by the mid 50's more than 750 such positions existed.

As the guidance function evolved so did other pupil services. Gradually these services fell into an organized structure with guidance counseling as one part of a broader program of pupil personnel services, which includes such functions as psychology, health, social work and speech and hearing therapy.

Current organization structures for delivering guidance services vary considerably, generally based on the size of the school district. Three hundred seventy-two districts have directors of guidance. In 201 districts a guidance coordinator may act as an assistant to the director or hold the top position in the structure. Supervising guidance counselors, whether in charge of one or several school buildings, are employed in 111 districts.*

Statements of the role and functions of guidance counselors developed by professional groups generally are broader in scope than the definition in the Education Law. For example, the American School Counselor Association's description of the role of the secondary school counselor includes the following: "... he helps each pupil to: understand himself in relation to the social and psychological world in which he lives; accept himself as he is; develop personal decision-making competencies; resolve special problems."**

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* Duplicate reporting under more than one title accounts for the variance in the number of positions reported compared with the number of districts employing professional guidance staffs.

** The Role of the Secondary School Counselor, American School Counselor Association, 1966.

The goals and functions of guidance counseling programs vary from school district to school district. Typically, however, programs concentrate on helping students resolve educational, occupational and personal problems and may involve:

-- orientation to school or a new school setting;

-- selection of a high school curriculum;

-- development of sound study habits;

-- selection of and application to post-secondary education;

-- career planning and decision making;

-- job placement; and

-- resolution of home or social problems.

During the 1973-74 school year there were slightly more male counselors statewide than female - 53 percent versus 47 percent.

Almost 90 percent of the guidance counselors in this State held a master's degree or more. Over 78 percent were permanently certified. Over half the counselors (53.3 percent) were between the ages of 33 and 48, with another 31.1 percent 49 or older.

During the last school year, counselors across the State had a median salary of $18,394 while one out of every four counselors earned in excess of $20,222 annually.*

A closer review of salaries revealed that, much like

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* Source: State Education Department, Information Center on Education.

school superintendents' salaries,* guidance counselors' salaries varied on a geographical basis, as shown in the following table:

Region	Percentile		
	25th	50th	75th
Nassau-Suffolk	$17,188	$19,654	$21.094
New York City	18,205	19,250	20,222
Mid Hudson	15,760	18,550	20,913
Genesee-Finger Lakes	14,100	16,820	18,046
Western	14,474	16,475	17,437
Southern Tier Central	14,690	16,137	17,146
Lake George-Lake Champlain	13,200	15,459	16,965
Upper Hudson	12,859	15,208	17,237
Southern Tier East	13,445	15,070	16,988
Southern Tier West	13,334	14,996	16,046
Central	12,121	14,777	15,949
Black River-St. Lawrence	13,064	14,350	15,740
Upper Mohawk Valley	12,345	14,150	15,738

Median salaries varied more than $5,500 or 39 percent from a low of $14,150 (in the Upper Mohawk Valley) to a high of $19,654 (in the Nassau-Suffolk region).

Until September of 1973 those seeking certification in guidance were required to have prior teaching experience. Now permanent certification may be secured by either: completion of

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* A complete analysis of salaries paid to superintendents of schools is contained in "The Superintendent of Schools: His Role, Background and Salary," Office of Education Performance Review, Albany, New York, June 1974.

a program registered and approved by the State Education Department for counseling services; or completion of 60 hours of graduate study in school counseling.

Methodology

In view of the cost and potential impact of guidance counselors, the Office of Education Performance Review undertook this study to determine: (1) their actual role and functions; and (2) the effectiveness of the services provided.

This examination was based on the perceptions of parents, students and counselors themselves as measured in interviews and questionnaires. In evaluating services primary attention was given to the needs various functions were designed to meet. Since guidance programs should exist to help students, the key criterion applied was whether students and parents believed that they had benefited from such services.

Using the regional distribution of guidance counselor positions as a guide, counselors in 68 upstate school districts received questionnaires.

In New York City 15 community school districts and 10 academic and vocational high schools located in each of the boroughs were selected. With cooperation from the New York City Board of Education, community superintendents and high school principals, 250 questionnaires were distributed to guidance counselors in these schools.

In all cases the questionnaires were completed anonymously and respondents were asked to return the forms directly without intervening supervisory review.

The 23-item questionnaires dealing with guidance counselors' backgrounds, functions, work activities, and attitudes were completed by 423 counselors statewide. Twelve percent of the sample were elementary school counselors, 27 percent middle school counselors and 61 percent secondary school counselors.

With volunteer aid from members of various branches of the American Association of University Women, 519 interviews and questionnaires were completed with parents and academic, vocational and BOCES high school pupils during the spring of 1974.

Of the 727 students completing questionnaires, 92 percent attended academic high schools, six percent attended vocational high schools, and two percent attended BOCES. The sample of students was spread almost equally over the last three years of high school, with 34 percent in the tenth grade, 35 percent in the eleventh, and 31 percent in the twelfth. Students surveyed were from New York City and 32 counties located elsewhere in the State, representing urban, suburban and rural areas.

In addition, questionnaires were completed by 292 parents not necessarily from the same family unit as those students surveyed. Volunteers selected parents with varying socioeconomic backgrounds.

Parents living in New York City and 36 counties located throughout the State (representing urban, suburban and rural areas) completed questionnaires.

Moreover, interviews were conducted with school superintendents, elementary and secondary school principals, guidance supervisors, guidance counselors, groups of student leaders, and acknowledged experts in the field of school guidance. A review of current pertinent literature was conducted and background materials

were obtained from both the State Education Department and the New York City Board of Education.

FINDINGS

Responses of Counselors Surveyed

Of the 423 guidance counselors sampled, approximately 90 percent had been in the same job location and position for the prior two years. Ninety-three percent were employed on a full-time basis.

One percent of those responding lacked any teaching experience; 70 percent had more than five years teaching experience. Approximately 40 percent had no experience outside of a school system.

Full-time secondary school guidance counselors responding to this study reported student/counselor ratios as shown below:

Student/Counselor Ratio	Percentage Of Sample
Under 1:251	5
1:251 - 1:350	43
1:351 - 1:500	36
1:501 - 1:750	9
1:751 - 1:1000	2
Over 1:1000	4

As shown, almost 80 percent of those responding reported between 251 and 500 students assigned to them. An additional 15 percent reported student/counselor ratios in excess of 1:500.

Ratios may not fully reflect the counselors' actual work load. Some programs provide services to dropouts and graduates. Counselors surveyed for this study estimated 91 percent of their counseling time was given to currently enrolled students, four percent to dropouts, and five percent to graduates.

The State Education Department has not established ratios except for projects receiving Federal funding under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.* For these projects the recommended standards are 1:600 in elementary schools and 1:350 in the secondary schools.

Slightly less than half (49 percent) of the secondary school guidance counselors surveyed reported student/counselor ratios equal to or less than that recommended for Title III projects.

Ratios, however, are not necessarily significant in assessing the quality of services. For example, they may not show that many counselors provide intensive service to small segments of the student population. According to the report of the Guidance Advisory Council, "The secondary schools of New York City currently employ 222 regular full-time guidance counselors to serve the basic needs of about 93 percent of the total high school population. The remaining seven percent are served by an additional 160 counselors..."**

Some of the counselors responding to this survey supervised other personnel, as follows:

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* Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act funds supplementary and innovative educational programs.

** Board of Education of the City of New York, "Agenda for Action, A Report of the Guidance Advisory Council to the Board of Education of the City of New York," July 1972.

Supervision Exercised Over:	Percentage Of Sample*
Clerical assistants	54
Volunteers	33
Paraprofessionals	14
Other guidance counselors	11

Even though more than half of the counselors surveyed reported supervision over clerical assistants, a 1971 State Education Department study** reported that the second major work activity of guidance counselors statewide was "routine clerical." The following table details the time utilization findings of the 1971 study of about 4,000 counselors:

Work Activity	Percentage Of Total Work Time
Individual counseling of pupils	42.4
Routine clerical	10.2
Group counseling and guidance	9.9
Consultation with teachers and administrators	9.9
Consultation with parents	8.5
Organization and administration of services	5.3
Standardized testing	2.6
Non-guidance activities	2.6
Community referrals	2.5
Orientation activities	2.3
Other guidance activities	2.2
Research and evaluation	1.6

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* In some instances counselors reported supervising more than one type of employee. Therefore responses total 112 percent.

** State Education Department, Information Center on Education, "In-Depth Survey of School Guidance Programs in New York State, 1970-71," June 1971.

As noted, the work activities and role of the guidance counselor embrace a variety of functions. Three years later when asked which functions were most important, counselors contacted for this current survey responded as shown in the following table:

Most Important Function	Percentage Of Sample
Individual counseling	26
Vocational or college guidance	19
Parent consultation	10
Teacher consultation	9
Scheduling	8
Group counseling	7
Acting as ombudsman	7
Test administration and interpretation	4
Other	10

Certain of the free answer responses overlap. For example, "acting as ombudsman" could entail individual counseling or consultation with a teacher, although only nine percent of the responses indicated teacher consultation as being a "most important" function. Job placement and orientation were rarely mentioned.

When asked what functions they considered least important, counselors responded as shown in the following table:

Least Important Function	Percentage Of Total
General clerical	44
Administrative duties	17
Scheduling	13
No activity least important	11
Meetings, workshops	3
Public relations	3
College related	2
Other	7

Overwhelmingly counselors felt that general clerical work was the least important activity they engaged in. As noted, counselors surveyed in 1971 reported allocating over ten percent of their total work time to "routine clerical" work. The 17 percent of the responses citing administrative duties as least important mentioned activities such as attendance control, discipline, test administration, monitoring of pupils, and proctoring.

Eleven percent of the total responses indicated that no activity undertaken could be considered "least important." Thirteen percent listed scheduling as a least important activity, yet - as will be shown later - many students sought counselor assistance in this area.

When asked, "If budget restrictions necessitated cutbacks, what guidance activities would you recommend be curtailed?", approximately 40 percent of those responding felt that nothing could be curtailed. Of the remaining approximately 60 percent, many counselors indicated nonguidance functions such as attendance control, test monitoring and discipline could be eliminated.

Given the opposite premise - "If additional funds were available, what guidance activities would you initiate or expand?" - many counselors felt that professional staff should be increased so that student/counselor ratios could be reduced. In the area of program expansion, the predominant response was that career education programs be developed. This was followed by: expansion of group counseling; increased activity with parents; development of elementary school guidance programs; creation of work-study programs; and working with teachers on curriculum.

Sixty percent of counselors perceived themselves as "readily available" to counsel pupils and parents on relatively short notice, or as "usually able" (28 percent) to get away from other duties in order to perform this function. Only 11 percent categorized themselves as "sometimes unavailable," while one percent said they were "frequently unavailable" because of other duties.

Nearly 60 percent of guidance counselors sampled indicated that they lacked the resources to give adequate attention to critical functions. High student-counselor ratios, burdensome clerical duties, improper assignment of responsibilities and widespread misunderstanding of the counselor's role were frequently cited as compounding the problem. Other factors cited were parental indifference and negative community attitudes.

Although many counselors felt they lacked the resources to give full attention to critical functions, when asked, "Could significant savings in guidance staff time be achieved by assigning certain duties now performed to...?", counselors responded as shown in the following table:

	Percentage of Sample		
Assign Duties To:	Yes	No	Not Sure
Clerical assistants	74	18	8
Paraprofessionals	53	32	15
Student aides	32	50	18
Volunteers	28	48	24

Regarding the counselors' concern that their role is misunderstood, surveyed counselors were asked, "Do you believe that the role of the guidance counselor in the education process is well understood by...?" brought the following reactions:

	Percentage of Sample		
Counselors Understood By:	Yes	No	Not Sure
School administrators	48	37	15
Teachers	35	39	25
Pupils	62	21	17
Parents	40	30	30
General public	12	54	34
Other guidance counselors	77	9	14

The majority of counselors surveyed felt that pupils generally understood the role of the guidance counselor. Interestingly, less than half the reponding counselors believed that their role was understood by school administrators, teachers or parents. Surprisingly, nearly one of every four either said they were not sure or that counselors did not understand their own role.

In essence, counselors felt they were most understood by other counselors, then pupils, then administrators. They felt they were least understood by the general public, then teachers, then parents.

Responses of Parents Surveyed

Interviews were conducted with the questionnaires completed by 292 parents of school age children in an effort to determine how one affected group perceived the role and functions of guidance counselors. Ninety-four percent of the parents surveyed had children in either middle schools, high schools or BOCES.

Sixty-six percent of the parents surveyed indicated that each of their children had an assigned guidance counselor, 28 percent said they did not have an assigned counselor, while six percent did not know.

When asked, "During the current school year how many scheduled interviews have you had...?", parents responded as shown in the following table:

	Percentage of Sample		
Scheduled Interviews With:	No Interviews	One Interview	Two or More Interviews
Principal or administrators	76	13	11
Teachers	35	19	46
Guidance counselors	48	29	23
Other staff	84	8	8

A higher percentage of parents met with teachers than with any other group. Approximately half of the parents reported two or more interviews with a teacher. Slightly over half the parents responding met with a guidance counselor (52 percent) and the majority of those parents met only once. Less than one out of every four parents had met with a principal or school administrator.

Of those parents who met with any school staff member, 52 percent had initiated the interview.

Parents, when asked, "By whom have you most often been kept informed of significant school decisions that affect your children?", responded as shown in the following table:

Information Source	Percentage Of Sample
Guidance counselor	25
Teacher	25
Principal	20
Other school staff	8
None of the groups mentioned	22

Parents appear to be informed of school decisions in as many instances by teachers as by guidance counselors. Nearly one-quarter indicated that "none of the groups mentioned" had supplied information regarding school decisions.

Approximately 70 percent of parents surveyed felt that guidance staff should give equal service to all students, while the remaining 30 percent believed that guidance services should be concentrated on students with identified problems.

Eighty percent of the parents felt that guidance counselors were "readily" or "usually available" for consultation. Sixteen percent reported that their counselor was sometimes "difficult to meet with" and four percent claimed that the counselor was "rarely available." However, parents felt that teachers were more accessible than guidance counselors and 89 percent of the parents responding believed teachers were usually available for consultation.

Parents were asked what guidance activities they considered most and least important. Considered most important were: selection of a high school course of study; selection of and application to a college; and testing to ascertain interests, aptitudes and abilities.

In parents' opinions least important activities were: development of social skills; job placement; and encouraging participation in school and community activities.

Parents were asked, "During the past school year did the guidance counselor help one or more of your children...?" They responded as follows:

	Percentage of Sample			
Counselor Helpful In:	Yes	No	Don't Know	Does Not Apply
Changing class schedule	60	26	2	12
Understanding school programs and procedures	38	42	12	8
College acceptance	18	38	1	43
Improving study habits	17	59	10	14
Changing the track to which assigned	11	58	5	26
Securing employment	6	61	0	33
Securing financial aid	5	53	1	41
Entry into a work-study program	5	54	2	39
Contacting a community service to help with a special problem	1	60	1	38

In only one category, getting a class schedule changed, did the affirmative responses outweigh the negative responses. In

securing employment, securing financial aid, entry into a work-study program, or contacting a community service, the negative responses outnumbered the affirmative responses by a ratio of two to one.

As noted, parents felt that the second most important function of the guidance counselor was selection of and application to a college. Yet only 18 percent of parents responding said their counselors had been helpful in getting their children accepted by a college. If only the "yes" and "no" responses are tabulated for this question, then less than one out of every three parents responded that counselors had been helpful with college acceptance.

Parents were asked, "How would you describe the assistance given by the guidance counselor to you and your children in applying for college or a job?" The responses were tabulated in the following table:

Description of Assistance	Percentage Of Sample
Did an excellent job of helping my children decide where to apply	10
Did an acceptable job of matching my children's interests and abilities with appropriate colleges and jobs	28
Did not seem very knowledgeable about appropriate choices	20
Just went through the motions in a routine fashion	33
Handed out some bad advice	9

As shown, 62 percent of the parents surveyed felt counselors were performing at a less than acceptable level.

In assessing the complete functions of guidance counselors beyond college or job placement, parents' reactions were similar. In responding to the question, "If there were no guidance counselors in your school, what effect would it have on your childrens' educational, vocational or social development?", parents felt:

Effect on Development	Percentage Of Sample
Development would have been impaired	15
A necessary job would not have been done	28
Doubt it would make much difference	40
Children would have been better off	1
Don't really know	16

As shown, 40 percent of the surveyed parents felt counselors made little difference as compared to a slightly higher percentage (43 percent) who felt their children would have been neglected. The fact that 16 percent didn't know suggests a negligible effect also.

Even though 41 percent of the parents surveyed did not feel that counselors made a significant difference in the development of their children, when they were asked to characterize their guidance counselor they generally selected positive adjectives to describe personal traits, as follows:

Personal Trait	Percentage Of Sample
Helpful	22
Interested	19
Understanding	17
Impersonal	10
Open-minded	8
Indifferent	8
Uninformed	7
Committed	4
Patronizing	4
Unfair	1

Responses of Students Surveyed

Two hundred and twenty-seven secondary school students completed questionnaires regarding their experiences with and attitudes toward guidance counselors. Students' responses paralleled the responses given by the parents.

Thirty-six percent of students responding had been assigned to the same counselor for three years or more. Thirty-five percent had the same counselor for one year.

Students were asked, "How many times did you consult your guidance counselor this school year concerning...?" Their responses, are shown in the following table:

Topic of Discussion	Interview Initiated By Student	Interview Initiated By Counselor
Further education	245	282
Problems concerning courses, grades or teachers	223	74
Schedule changes	227	60
Employment	51	21
Personal or behavioral problems	45	23

In every instance but discussion of "further education" (where 53 percent of the contacts were initiated by the counselor) the majority of interviews were initiated by the student. The nature of the other topics listed may explain this.

On a single topic basis, more interviews were held to discuss further education (a total of 527) than any other single subject. However, students indicated meeting with guidance counselors more often to discuss problems with a course or for a schedule change (a total of 584 interviews) than discussion regarding further education.

Approximately 71 percent of responding students described their counselors as "rather easy to see" or "usually available by appointment." Seven percent felt that their counselors tried to find time to see them, but were not always successful. A total of 22 percent said that either they hadn't tried to see their counselors or that counselors were too busy.

Students were asked if their guidance counselor had assisted them in any of a variety of areas during the current school year. The responses are shown in the following table:

	Percentage of Sample		
Counselor Assisted In:	Yes	No	Does Not Apply
Changing class schedule	54	39	7
Understanding school programs and procedures	37	57	6
College acceptance	19	40	41
Improving study habits	12	70	18
Changing the track to which assigned	11	64	25
Securing financial aid	8	51	41
Securing employment	7	56	37
Entry into a work-study program	6	60	34
Contacting a community service to help with a special problem	4	58	38

In all but one category, changing a class schedule, students' negative responses far outweighed positive reactions.

To determine if counselors had helped students decide on major changes in their actions or had led them to a school or job they did not know about, students were asked, "As a result of discussions with the guidance counselor have you at any time...?" The responses are shown in the following table:

Influenced Decision On	Percentage of Sample	
	Yes	No
Preparation for an occupation not previously considered	12	88
Changing a course of study	30	70
Application to a college not previously considered	17	83
Application for a job not previously known about	7	93

An overwhelming majority of students indicated that their guidance counselors had not substantially altered their course of action. However, in many instances the role of the counselor may not be that of a change agent but rather as a source of support for decisions already made.

In essence, these responses would seem to indicate that students felt they had not been helped by their counselors. However, when asked, "Have your guidance counselors been as helpful as you think they should be?", the majority of students surveyed (56 percent) replied affirmatively. Although the negative responses (44 percent of the total) were in the minority they still represented more than two students out of every five.

CONCLUSIONS

The role and functions of guidance counselors are not clear.

There are major differences in how counselors, parents and students perceive guidance activities.

Generally students seem to perceive counselors as sources of help for relatively short-range problems, while counselors see themselves as dealing with broader, longer-range problems. Interestingly, counselors ranked students second among groups that understood the role and function of guidance personnel. In addition, nearly one out of every four counselors surveyed was unsure if counselors themselves understood their role.

These varying perceptions are compounded by a general lack of clearly defined program objectives. This was revealed also by a 1971 State Education Department study* and still has not been corrected.

The range of functions normally assigned to a guidance department dilutes the resources available for counseling and is wasteful of professional counselor skills.

The responses of counselors and students indicate that scheduling, routine clerical tasks and general administrative duties occupied too much of the professional counselor's time.

The majority of counselors responding felt that they lacked the resources to give full attention to critical functions, and that they devoted too much time to routine clerical work.

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* Op. Cit., p. 11

There are no staffing standards for guidance services.*

The almost total absence of established staffing patterns combined with a lack of clear program objectives makes meaningful evaluation of counseling services exceedingly difficult.

Counselors do not appear to exercise a marked influence on student decisions with respect to choice of occupation or post-secondary education.

If one role of a guidance counselor is to influence students decisions, then responses from students surveyed suggest a serious lack of effectiveness.

Parents and students reported that counselors had not been of assistance in many specific guidance activities.

Changing class schedules was the only specific guidance activity listed for which a majority of parents and students said they had received counselor assistance. Most parents and students said that counselors had not assisted with: college acceptance, securing employment, securing financial aid, understanding school programs and procedures, entry into work-study programs, improving study habits, or contacting community services for help with special problems.

There is wide dissatisfaction with the services provided by guidance counselors.

Two out of every five parents surveyed felt that guidance counselors had little effect on their childrens development. A slightly higher percentage (44 percent) of students felt their guidance counselors were not as helpful as they should be. This is

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* Except for programs funded under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

particularly disappointing, when viewed against the framework of the legal and conceptual basis of guidance programs. The Education Law enumerates one guidance objective as "organizing and conducting a counseling service in the schools to assist pupils in the formation of their educational and vocational plans." The survey responses of the "consumers" of guidance programs reveal that these programs are not achieving their objectives in far too many situations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Guidance counseling can be a valuable service to school children. However, because of unclear or missing goals and guidelines, excessive nonprofessional and relatively unimportant work activities, and a general lack of understanding of their roles, counselors are often unable to provide meaningful services. Therefore, school district boards of education promptly should:

Develop clear program objectives responsive to local needs and define the role and functions of the guidance counselors.

Obviously objectives must first be established in order to assess the effectiveness of any counseling program. It is recognized that, because of wide variance in the socioeconomic composition of school districts, goals and guidelines could vary from district to district. However, certain fundamental concepts should be inherent in any counseling program. Noted guidance authorities have stressed that the primary function of a counselor might be assisting students in developing their own abilities to cope with current and future personal, occupational and educational decisions.

However, whatever goals and guidelines are finally adopted, they must be consistent with, and responsive to the needs and desires of the clientele and community served. It follows that counselors, parents, students, teachers and administrators should all participate in the development of these standards.

Take measures to assure that counselors are not spending an inordinate amount of time in such activities as clerical work, routine administrative duties and general "red tape."

Greater use should be made of student aides or volunteers in routine clerical and general administrative tasks. For example, school student associations could act as clearinghouses for printed occupational and educational materials.

Assure that wider use is made of students as peer counselors and volunteers as vocational counselors in support and extension of existing guidance staffs.

Peer counseling has long been an effective technique in dealing with a variety of situations, particularly personal problems. Students should be involved in peer counseling sessions to help other students in such areas as further education, drug abuse, and vocational choices. These students would not replace the professional counselor but would provide an additional helpful resource.

In addition, wider use should be made of community resources to aid students in the examination and assessment of various career opportunities.

When called upon to make career choices, few students really understand what is involved in the preparation for, or actual practice of a profession or occupation in which they have an interest. Even the high status occupations, such as the practice of medicine, require years of preparation beyond high school. While many students may understand the rewards involved, few can really visualize the years of work required. Working or retired members of the community could meet regularly with students to aid them in career decisions by providing valuable insights in their areas of specialization.

For example, union representatives could discuss particular vocations and preparation for them; members of various governmental and professional associations could, on a regular basis, provide career information to students in individual or group counseling settings.

Assure that guidance departments make full use of community resources.

Every community in New York State has a range of voluntary, religious and governmental agencies which customarily provide personal and family counseling, assistance in health and psychological areas, as well as employment and occupational assistance.

The guidance counselor should make complete use of these community services which are professionally staffed rather than dissipate his time by duplicating existing services.

Involve parents, teachers and students in an annual review of guidance program effectiveness.

Although many of the goals of a guidance program may not be quantifiable, certain measurable criteria exist including: a reduction in the number of dropouts, an increase in the number of students attending post-secondary education or finding employment, or a general improvement in the scholastic achievement of the school. Again, this evaluation would require the participation of counselors, parents, students, teachers and administrators.

In addition to action required at the local level, the State Education Department should provide assistance to operating school districts by:

Establishing staffing patterns for guidance counseling programs.

The more than 700 operating school districts in this State currently have widely varying staffing ratios. This is an area which certainly lends itself to objective and scientific study on a statewide basis.

Clarifying the role of the guidance counselor.

Although each school district must custom-tailor its guidance counseling functions to serve the special needs of its community, the State Education Department should establish a frame of reference which defines those functions and activities which are appropriate for guidance personnel as well as those which are wasteful of professional time and should be delegated or reassigned.

Reexamining the distribution of guidance counselor positions between elementary and secondary schools.

Many experts feel that greater priority should be given to the early detection and prevention of problems rather than concentration on the expensive and often ineffectual processes of correction after problems arise. If problems of school children were identified and dealt with early, perhaps society could save money and the individual spared suffering.

If what experts claim is indeed true, it suggests that the State Education Department should review the distribution of guidance counselors in public schools. Perhaps a redistribution of counseling positions with greater emphasis on elementary schools might provide more effective services. This can be accomplished without additional cost by the elimination of much of the nonprofessional and nonproductive activities already discussed and the gradual transfer within school districts of counseling positions from secondary to elementary schools.